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Leading Ideas



| What is Your Signature Ministry?

By Kay Kotan And Phil Schroeder On March 7, 2018

Leading Ideas

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In their book *Small Church Check Up*, Kay Kotan and Phil Schroeder say stable, smaller churches can remain vital by focusing on a “signature ministry,” providing one key ministry with excellence, rather than trying to be everything to everybody.

Often churches try to do too many things, being all things to all people without doing any ministry with excellence. Churches are filled with good people who are full of the best intentions. It is through those good intentions that we sometimes trip ourselves up. Small churches try to do too many things for too many different people. When this occurs, we are usually providing ministries that are just okay — nothing really excellent. We are often tiring out servants and burning people out.

“ We need to be able to say “yes” to the right thing and “no” to the others. How can we provide one key ministry with excellence and allow other programs and ministries to fall away?

It is ironic that many of our new larger churches have discovered the magic of doing one or two things really well. Many of our other churches (often, declining churches) are still trying to be everything to everybody. Vital, small churches do one or two things really well and are known for

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Want more *Right Question
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them in the community. One church I recently worked with had over half the children in the preschool indicate that they did not have a church home. This stable, small church with a signature preschool is now working to connect with those almost 60 families.

We need to be able to say “yes” to the right thing and “no” to the others. How can we provide one key ministry with excellence and allow other programs and ministries to fall away?

Is it a good idea? Or a godly idea?

Mike Selleck, retired United Methodist minister from North Georgia, taught us there is a difference between a good idea and a godly idea. A good idea comes from someone’s brain, and there are a lot of good ideas out there. A godly idea always comes with a leader and servants attached. If there are no leaders or workers, the idea is not yet in God’s time. You can spend a whole lot on good ideas, but you have the capacity to do only a small number of godly ideas that have servants and leaders attached to them.

Getting focused

Your church may not be able to give up all you are doing and do one thing, but you can choose one thing to focus on and do it really well. For example, focus on the mission of making disciples for the year and have all ministries use the missional focus. Encourage your church to choose a focus for the coming year that highlights your strongest ministry. The more effort and energy the church puts into this ministry, the less time it will spend trying to prop up ministries that are past their prime.

Zero-based calendaring

We must be willing to prune. If we don’t prune, we will get some growth, but it won’t be stable growth. One method to begin this process is to start with zero-based calendaring. With zero-based calendaring, we are not held captive by history and tradition to do the same things we have done for years or decades. We seek to discover the one or two signature ministries that our church has the passion and gifts to offer that meet the community’s needs. We might start the process by asking ourselves this question: “If we were to do nothing that we have ever done before, what is the one thing we must put on the calendar?” Go deep with one ministry rather than trying to go wide with lots of ministries that do not really touch anyone or make an eternal difference.

What’s in your backyard?

Alice Rogers, pastor of Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church on Emory’s campus, reminds small churches to use their compass. They have often lost sight of what is right around them. What is right around the church in close proximity? She asks churches simply to look to see what is to the north, south, east, and west of their congregation. Sometimes what God is calling us to is right in our backyard, but we have been looking far and wide for something else.

This excerpt is taken and adapted from the book *Small-Church Checkup: Assessing Your Church’s Health and Creating a Treatment Plan*, by Kay Kotan and Phil Schroeder. Copyright © 2018 by Discipleship Resources, Nashville, Tennessee. All rights reserved. Used by permission. The book is available at [Upper Room Books](#), [Cokesbury](#), and [Amazon](#).




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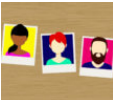
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